

■ Educators are hoping more money is on the way as kids get settled in

By JODI LEE REIFER
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

Public school students returned to the classroom this morning, some excited by the prospects of a new beginning and others concerned that looming budget cuts will do away with popular programs.

"I like school," said Taylon Holmes of Clifton, a 12-year-old entering the seventh grade at Dreyfus Intermediate School in Stapleton. "In the summer, when you wake up you don't have nothing to do."

But Dawn Dreher felt nervous, and it wasn't because the New Dorp High School senior was suffering the typical first-day-of-school jitters.

She was on edge after learning early morning tutoring had been canceled at her school. Without the extra help, the Dongan Hills student fears she may not pass the science Regents test she needs to graduate.

The tutoring service fell victim to the Board of Education budget cuts, which knocked \$7 million in funding out of the high school district budget.

The system, in total, is \$290 million short this year, an Albany- and City Hall-generated deficit that has caused officials to curtail new initiatives in high schools and strip elementary schools of their bands and Project Read,

among other programs.

The elimination of Project Read concerned Lourdes Ramos of Rosebank. The native Spanish speaker had hoped to re-enroll her daughter Deborah in the after-school tutorial program.

"That was one of the programs that was very helpful," she said as she dropped Deborah, 9, off for her first day of fourth grade at PS 13. "I'm disappointed. I'll help my daughter but school is the best place to learn."

State leaders are soon expected to OK an additional budget that would increase funding by an undetermined amount.

As public school students in elementary and intermediate schools returned to class today, most seemed oblivious to the massive cuts and political dissent coloring the new school year.

"I missed my friends, including teachers, all this summer," said Della Mae Taylor, 10, a fifth grader at PS 25 in West Brighton. "I went to summer school, but I learn more during the year."

Other students knew some of their favorite activities and teachers might have disappeared.

Last year Kathryn Tooker, 10, played flute in the PS 30 band, which, as of now, doesn't exist.

"I'm pretty sad about it," said the fifth-grader. The Westerleigh girl said she feels proud of herself when she plays the flute.

Her parents and sister, Julia, 8, who hoped to make the fourth-grade band this year on saxophone, also feel let down by the program's cancellation.

"I think it's really tough going back the first day and getting all the bad news," said their mother, Eva. "It's just an extra challenge for them. Why should children have to make these adjustments?"

To some parents, the news has been hard to accept.

Carolyn Winfield, whose daughter started kindergarten today at PS 57 in Clifton and whose grandson became a second-grader today at PS 14 in Stapleton, said she heard about budget cuts but didn't realize they might affect her youngsters.

Her grandson, Raheem Brizz, wasn't at all interested in reading until he went for after-school help. "Project Read helped him a whole lot," said Ms. Winfield.

Parents and students alike have come to rely on after-school extras.

Miss Dreher credits early-morning tutoring with getting her through her Global Studies Regents. "The first time I took it, I failed, said the New Dorp senior. The second time I took it, I got an 82," she said.

Although Staten Island high schools will continue to be funded at last year's level, money for new programs will be scarce and some programs will be scaled back. New Dorp plans to offer a new CPR course to students, but might run into problems.

"We might have a difficult time raising money for the dummies," said Principal Deirdre DeAngelis. "We're, like, looking at each other, saying, 'Where are we going to get the money?'"

Saturday classes have been

canceled at all of the borough's high schools. New Dorp's after-school Regents tutoring has also been pared down. Instead of starting in late September, the program won't get going until November, giving students less time to bone up for the exams.

According to some observers, the grief caused by the budget strife is unnecessary.

"It's all about politics," said Lizette Meletiche of Stapleton, a working mother who has two children attending Dreyfus Intermediate and worries after-school programs there will be affected. "They are probably going to wait for a new mayor to fix it."

Staten Island's representative to the Board of Education blames Schools Chancellor Levy for taking away vital services from students.

"I think this is politically motivated," said Jerry Cammarata. "These are priority issues for the mayor and it's an attack on [Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani]."

About three weeks ago, Levy executed his first round of cuts, \$100 million this year from the Board of Education's central administration and another \$200 million from the central board, for a total of \$300 million over three years. Giuliani had promised to give schools more money if Levy trimmed the bureaucracy at the board's 110 Livingston St. headquarters in downtown Brooklyn.

But Giuliani wasn't satisfied with the initial cuts, so Levy axed another \$190 million directly from school districts last week.

"It's unconscionable," said Cammarata, noting the budget cuts

amount to less than 2 percent of the Board of Education's approximately \$12 billion budget. "The bureaucracy is big enough where cuts should be made [elsewhere]. He should start by removing one deputy chancellor."

Still, the new school year doesn't signal bad news for all students.

Pupils at the Petrides School in Sunnyside and the Hungerford School in Clifton will benefit from a large grant to develop arts programs to share with other schools. Both schools have already received initial grants from the Center for Arts Education, a public-private partnership formed to restore arts education money slashed from the city's public schools during the fiscal crisis of the 1970s.

The Center's Curriculum Development and Access grants will promote partnerships with cultural institutions and evaluate which programs work best so they can be replicated in other schools.

The Petrides School, an experimental school for kids in prekindergarten through grade 12, will create a guide to integrating the arts into the curriculum. The focus will be on dance and language arts.

The Hungerford School for severely disabled high school students will work with the Noble Maritime Collection. Teachers will develop a curriculum manual for using visual and performing arts to teach social studies, English and the arts.